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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the use of young children's artwork in the assessment of reading abilities. The research method for the study was qualitative, and the design followed an interpretive approach. Subjects were 12 transitional-first grade students (a transitional-first grade allows a child with normal academic ability more time to develop the maturity for first grade) from an elementary school in Alabama. A portfolio for each child consisted of artwork and documentation of reading abilities recorded each month. Indicators for the stage of art development were based on the work of Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987). Findings are reported for the first 3 months. Five children were still in the preschematic level of art development, with some growth being demonstrated in the emergent reading level of each child. Two were in transition between the preschematic and schematic stages of art development as they moved into the third emergent reading level. Two remained constant in both artwork and emergent reading level. Two others had not moved into the third emergent reading level, but their artwork indicated that they were ready to make connections. One had moved into the third emergent reading level even though her artwork indicated that she was not ready to make connections. Findings suggest that children's artwork may offer insights into the development of literacy, and that it may be a tool for the assessment of reading level or ability. (Contains 5 tables and 10 references.) (SLD)

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ASSESSMENT: YOUNG CHILDREN AND THE VISUAL ARTS

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ASSESSMENT: YOUNG CHILDREN AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the use of young children's artwork in the assessment of reading abilities. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987), if the objects in a child's drawing are unrelated to each other (a characteristic of the preschematic stage of art development), then that child does not have the ability to relate letters to each other and is not ready to learn to read. Adults can encourage the development of literacy by providing children with a variety of drawing materials. Literacy can be encouraged by helping children to become more aware of their environment and their relationship to that environment. This developing awareness of their relationship to the environment is reflected in the child's drawing.

Literature Review

Young children have a difficult time expressing themselves verbally (Protherough, 1983; Smith, 1976). Art offers children an opportunity to create something with which they may identify (Carson, 1985). According to Goldberg (1992), artistic expression allows children to express what they know and what they understand in another medium. Britsch (1993) further stated that children use their drawings to tell a story.

In an effort to investigate multiple ways of knowing, Clyde (1994) entered a first grade classroom as a co-teacher instead of as a visitor. She found that, through artwork, one child was better able to express his thought and his knowledge on a particular subject. According to Clyde, "the more global nature of art provided a more compatible format for Douglas' ideas" (p. 28).

Through the incorporation of art and drawing into high school honors English classes, Claggett and Brown (1992) found that students were better able to make meaning as they read and as they wrote. They stated that students were able to move from the visual to the verbal by talking about their drawings. Drawings enabled them to discover, develop, and confirm their own ideas and perceptions.

In conclusion, artwork allows younger and older students an avenue of self-expression. Through various media, children are able to express what they know. Later, this lends itself to the enhancement of verbal expression.

Methodology

Research Design

The research method for this study was qualitative and the research design followed an interpretative approach. This design allowed for observations, interviews, artifacts, and content analysis (Vierra & Pollock, 1988). This design was chosen because

children's artwork and reading levels could better be analyzed and understood through observation.

Subjects

The subjects for this study consisted of a group of 12 transitional-first grade children from an elementary school in Calhoun County, Alabama. Traditionally, first grade has been the place and time to begin formal instruction in reading (Shuman, 1979). A transitional-first grade class was chosen for this study because these children are in transition between kindergarten and first grade - a transition between non-reading and reading. The transitional-first grade was designed for the child with normal academic ability but who needs more time to develop the maturity needed to succeed in first grade. It may not be appropriate for special education candidates, nor is it for students who are basically behavior problems.

Procedures

Each participant in the study constituted a case study. All participants were observed and participated in the same activities. A portfolio was developed for each child and consisted of artwork and documentation of reading abilities. The stage of art development and reading level of each child was determined. Artwork was collected from each child on a monthly basis throughout the school year and reading levels were recorded.

A journal was maintained throughout the study by the researcher. Copious notes were kept as to the responses of the participants and the activities of the researcher.

Data Analysis

Indicators for the stage of art development were based upon the theories of Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987). Lowenfeld and Brittain's theories are based upon the premise that the child represents what he or she knows rather than what he or she sees. Those indicators are described in Table 1. Subjects that demonstrated characteristics of the preschematic stage and schematic stage of art development were classified as being in transition.

Criteria for the establishment of a reading level were based upon teacher observation. Since all participants were emergent readers, a scale was developed in order to determine the level of emergent reading. That criteria is described in Table 2.

Findings

Since this study is longitudinal and still in progress, only the findings for the first three months, August-October, will be discussed. The findings indicated that Chester, Justin, Ricky, Cameron, and Mark were still in the preschematic level of art development with some growth being demonstrated in the emergent reading level of each child. The artwork of Joshua and David

indicated that they were in transition between the preschematic and schematic stage of art development as they moved into the third emergent reading level. Megan and Payton remained constant in their art stage and emergent reading level. While Terrance and Michael had not moved into the third emergent reading level, their artwork indicated that they were ready to make connections. Lanae had moved into the third emergent reading level even though her artwork indicated that she was not ready to make connections. For an overview of all students, refer to Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Implications

Protherough (1983) contended that young children have a difficult time expressing themselves and what they know orally. The findings of this study are significant in that they suggest to the classroom teacher that children's artwork offer many insights into children's development of literacy. Artwork may be used as a tool in the assessment of reading level or ability.

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Table 1

Indicators for Art Development

Scribbling Stage Stage 1	
Children begin by making random marks on paper. Random marks become organized and controlled. Color is subordinate.	
Preschematic Stage Stage 2	
Space	Objects appear to be represented randomly in space.
Color	No relationship between object and color.
Design	No indication of design.
Details	No details, only generalizations.
Schematic Stage Stage 3	
Space	Use of baseline to connect items of the environment.
Color	There is a relationship between the object and the color.
Design	Repetition of forms (or schemata).
Details	Detailed drawing, indicating an awareness of the environment.
Stage of Dawning Realism Stage 4	
Space	Disappearance of baseline and emergence of the plane.
Color	Greater understanding of color differences.

Table 3. Continued.

Design	Discovers beauties of nature.
Details	Greater awareness of details.
Pseudo-Naturalist Stage Stage 5	
Space	Attempts at perspective.
Color	An increasing awareness of color.
Design	Interesting and intricate designs.
Details	Wrinkles and folds are important.
The Period of Decision Stage 6	
Space	Draws in perspective.
Color	Uses light and shade.
Design	Recognition of patterns within natural objects.
Details	Exaggeration of detail for emphasis.

Table 2

Criteria for Level of Emergent Reading

LEVEL	CRITERIA
0	Unable to make one-to-one correspondence Very little phonemic, graphemic, & semantic identification/association
1	Beginning to understand one-to-one correspondence Just beginning to understand phonemic, graphemic, & semantic identification/association These children know that there is a reason to read and are afraid to take any risk to try
2	Further development of one-to-one correspondence Further development of phonemic, graphemic, & semantic identification/association Beginning to take initiative to try to read
3	Starting to transfer knowledge of one-to-one correspondence, phonemic, graphemic, & semantic to reading Developing confidence about the concept of reading independently Starting to make predictions These children want to make sense of print

Table 3

August: Reading Level and Art Stage

STUDENTS	READING LEVEL	ART STAGE
Chester	0	Preschematic
Joshua	2	Transition
Megan	2	Preschematic
Justin	0	Preschematic
Terrance	1	Schematic
Michael	0	Preschematic
Payton	2	Preschematic
Ricky	1	Preschematic
Lanae	2	Preschematic
Cameron	0+	Preschematic
David	2	Preschematic
Mark	0	Preschematic

Table 4

September: Reading Level and Art Stage

STUDENTS	READING LEVEL	ART STAGE
Chester	0	Preschematic
Joshua	2	Transition
Megan	2	(no data)
Justin	0	Preschematic
Terrance	1	Schematic
Michael	0	Preschematic
Payton	2	Preschematic
Ricky	1	Preschematic
Lanae	3	Preschematic
Cameron	1	Preschematic
David	2+	Transition
Mark	0	Preschematic

Table 5

October: Reading Level and Art Stage

STUDENTS	READING LEVEL	ART STAGE
Chester	1	Preschematic
Joshua	3	Schematic
Megan	2	Preschematic
Justin	1	Preschematic
Terrance	2	(no data)
Michael	1	Schematic
Payton	2	Preschematic
Ricky	2	Preschematic
Lanae	3	Preschematic
Cameron	1+	Preschematic
David	3	Preschematic
Mark	1	Preschematic

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